

Marquette Ore Dock No. 6:
Timber Trestle
Fifth to Lake Streets
Marquette
Marquette County
Michigan

HAER No. MI-45-B

HAER
MICH

52-MARQ,
1B-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
MID-ATLANTIC REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

MARQUETTE ORE DOCK NO. 6:
TIMBER TRESTLE

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Location: Between the east side of Lake Street and the ore dock jutting into the Lower Harbor in Marquette City, Marquette County, Michigan.

UTM 16.470120.5154000
Quad: Marquette, MI

Engineer: Merritt-Chapman & Whitney Corporation,
Duluth, Minnesota.

Date of Construction: 1931-1932.

Present Owner: Wisconsin Central, Ltd.
One O'Hare Center
6250 North River Road, Suite 9000
Rosemont, Illinois 60018

Present Use: Vacant.

Significance: The timber trestle is an excellent example of mid-twentieth timber construction. This type of construction was common before the use of steel. The original plans called for the entire approach to the dock to be constructed of timber. However the inexpensive price of steel during the Great Depression caused a change in plans and this portion of the approach is all that remains of the earlier type of approach construction.

Project Information: This documentation was undertaken from June through August 1990 in accordance with agreements with Wisconsin Central, Ltd., the Interstate Commerce Commission, the National Park Service, and the Michigan State Bureau of History.

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The timber trestle is located in the city of Marquette between the end of the concrete portion of the ore dock and the timber pier on the east side of Lake Street. It consists of 840,000 board feet per thousand (BFM) of timbers and the total length of this structure is 420 feet. On this portion of the approach the incline varies from 685.09 feet on the west side to 687.17 feet at the top of the ore dock.

This is the physical remains of a common type of historic approach construction. It was used because it was cheaper than using steel. However at the same time it was a fire hazard. Originally it had been planned to construct the entire approach with timber. However after this portion of the approach had been constructed, the lower cost of steel during the Great Depression allowed steel to be used from Lake Street westward.

Work on the timber trestle between the dock and Lake Street commenced on 29 May with the placement of grillage supports for the substructure foundation. This work was completed by 29 July. As this work was completed, piles were driven and the approach bents placed between Lake Street and the waterfront (6 June-29 June). The site was filled with activity by the middle of June. There were several hoists, pile drivers and six barges in full operation. The first wooden approach trestles were being set into place. They were constructed in sections on the ground and then were connected to one another by side timbers. By 20 August the major timber work had been completed on the Lake Street portion of the approach and by 9 September the ties for the rails were in place. Now all that could be done was to await the end of the navigation season when the old approach would be dismantled.

On the trestle itself there are three added features. On the south side there is one of two stairways to the top of the structure. Nearby there are steps to the south walk onto the dock. A warming house is located at the southeast corner of the trestle overhanging the structure measuring 10 feet x 42 feet. Within the structure there are four rooms: the office (8'3" x 9'), the tool room (5'6" x 9'), the warming room (18'4" x 9') and the toilet room (7'3" x 9'). The water closet and urinal had direct access to the lake waters below.

The timber trestle needed constant maintenance. The bridge piling and crib work was repaired during the winters of 1965-1966 and 1966-1967. Finally the untreated dock timbers were replaced with rot resistant treated timbers.

The status of the dock remained undecided. On 8 March 1985 Krech & Ojard Consulting Engineers based in Duluth, Minnesota released a report, "Removal Estimate of the Soo Line Ore Dock in Marquette MI" which had been ordered by the Michigan Department

of Transportation. The combined cost for the removal of the timber portion of the approach, the dock superstructure to elevation 610.35, and the outer timber tail trestle was estimated at \$3,039,454.

Questions of vandalism, trespass, liability and fire have been raised and dealt with since the construction of the structure. Originally a three inch water pipe was fastened to the bent and the pipe with three fire hose outlets ran the length of the structure. The concern for fire prompted the DSS&A to employ a watchman. During World War II there was concern with sabotage, so the dock was guarded as a precaution. Extra extinguishers were added at the timber trestle area for added protection as well. The question of using the dock to unload petroleum products and gasoline was raised by the International Oil Company in May 1950. The company wanted to run a pipeline along the dock to its storage tanks in the vicinity. DSS&A officials, citing a high fire danger to an extremely important facility, declined the offer even though it meant the loss of tanker car traffic on the line. The maze of timber on the trestle approach to the dock constantly caused concern for officials. In 1957 the first discussions were conducted concerning the replacement of the old timbers with fire retardant ones. This was done in a six year period during the 1960s. On 20 August 1961 two juvenile vandals brought the problem of fire to the attention of officials. Although the small fire only charred a bulletin board and was quickly extinguished, there was concern that more extensive damage could have been done. Although a fence existed at the site, there was talk of placing a more secure fence at the location.

At the present time the timber trestle remains in place. The timber decking at the top is a source of concern because it has deteriorated. The electrical lighting over this section of the trestle has fallen into disrepair. The stairs are still in place but Wisconsin Central Ltd is seriously concerned about their use for any purpose. The warming house is empty and windowless.

Bibliography/Data Sources

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